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**THE ABOLITION OF UNTOUCHABILITY: THE KEY TO STABILITY IN INDIA**

Across South Asia, the rise in religious extremism has become a cause for concern for the United States and other world powers. Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal all are facing violent factions within their borders that threaten the stability of their governments and in some cases have led to a complete disruption in international trade, development, and economic growth. While the US and India share a common goal of fighting terrorism within South Asia and stopping these violent extremists, neither country has done an adequate job of understanding the causes of this instability or discovering why countries like Pakistan must now walk a perilous line between religious extremism and secular governance.

The violence across South Asia has its roots in the Hindu caste system. As the US continues its campaign against global terrorism and works to advance democracy, the US will not succeed in South Asia unless it understands and addresses the damage done by caste. India as a country cannot and will not be able to sustain its democracy unless Hinduism locates the malady that has turned 750 million low caste people and Dalits into ticking time bombs. This malady is caste.

The caste system is specific to the Indian subcontinent. It was a by-product of the invader psyche of Aryan Brahmins who treated the native dark-skinned people as unworthy of being humans. Though all countries in the world have suffered some form of racial discrimination, none have created such an immutable culture of spiritual untouchability. This culture spread across all of South Asia and seeped into her neighbors. It emerged out of racial practices that go back more than 50,000 years. As all ancient and medieval social systems became institutionalized as totemic religions by putting idol worship at the

center, the Aryan religion combined totemic religion with rigorous spiritual inequality between light-skinned Aryans and dark-skinned Dravidians. It created a story of god that put the dark-skinned people of India as god's unwilling creation from his feet. It named these dark people Sudras – literally meaning slaves – and created the first form of slavery known to man. Unlike later European and US slavery, Indian slavery is a spiritual one that makes the sufferers perpetual social, economic, and political slaves.

This slavery was enforced in the form of brutal violence and barbarity. Tribes who were outside of the Aryan religion were kept untouchable by the Aryan priests. These people were darker-skinned and militant in nature. These groups had begun asserting their autonomy before being branded outcastes by the Brahmins. While the Sudras were not supposed to read and write the scriptures, the Dalits could not even enter the village community. This has not changed even after the independence of India.

Two stories of Hindu gods show the violence of this religion: first, the story of the birth of the Ganapathy, whose image is being spread across the world, is quite revealing.

Ganapathy was the son of the God Shiva. One day his mother, Parvathi, was bathing in her bathroom while her son kept watch at the gate so that nobody entered into the bathroom where his mother was bathing. Shiva suddenly came and wanted to enter into the bathroom to have his own time with his wife. When the boy objects his father chops off his son's head and enters the bathroom. When Parvathi enquires about their son, the father realizes his mistake and chops off the head of their family elephant and adds that head to his son's body and makes him relive. This is how the God with the elephant head was born. This story is repeated by every priest during the Vinayak Chavithi festival.

This story indicates the patricidal nature of the Hindu God's behavior. He not only does not hesitate to go into the bathroom of his wife, but he also does not hesitate to kill his own son for sake his sexual gratification.

Then there is the famous story of Parushurama, a well-known member of ten incarnations of another Hindu God, Vishnu, who kills his mother, Renuka. Rama, the most famous God in existence, who called his birthplace India, was pushed into burning and inciting communal riots killing thousands of people, ordered his brother Laxmana to cut off the earlobes of Shurpanaka, a Dravidian woman and the sister of Ravana. Krishna, yet another famous Hindu God, kills his own maternal uncle. This saga of killing women and humiliating them, as well as killing children and relatives leaves a culture of violence in Brahminic Hinduism.

The ongoing enslavement of the Dalits and Sudras across the Indian subcontinent left these low caste people with no choice but to seek alternatives to Hinduism. Most sought alternatives that rejected caste-based religion. Thus, Sri Lanka and Nepal became Buddhist, while Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan became Islamic. The people converting in these countries were all low caste, leading to a violent conflict between the low caste converts and their high caste rulers. Through this process, high caste leaders twisted the new religions to include some form of caste, leading to divisions within these

religions between violent anti-caste camps and the more normal, spiritualized versions existent in other countries. Thus, in Afghanistan, Islam became the violent religion of hundreds of millions of angry low caste people who continued to fight against their caste-minded enemies for decades.

Unfortunately, the violence associated with these religions and religious sub-groups has continued. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, in particular, a militant form of Islam continues to grow in numbers and in influence even as the enemy changes from Brahminism to secular government.

In India, hundreds of millions of low caste people are looking for a spiritual alternative to Hinduism. The first option being presented to them is Islam. More than two-thirds of the global Muslim population is on the Indian subcontinent. It is estimated that within decades India will have the largest Muslim population in the world.

The historical presence of Islam has been a largely spiritual and social one, as remnants of Islamic invaders practiced their faith and grew in numbers. Recently, however, Islam has grown exponentially as many lower castes wanted an alternate spiritual life that gives them equality. This type of growth led to the bifurcation of the country in 1947 as Muslims sought their own nation. Even after the bifurcation, tension between Muslims and Hindus continues and violence is widespread. Indian Muslims being the historically suppressed lower castes and Dalits they have an historical reason to be angry because the upper castes see them as the social mass who deserted and became free from their bondage. This situation led to many religious riots in India.. Thus India became the place of violence and counter violence

This is not to suggest that Islamic extremism is the only ideology that has tapped the pent-up low caste anger. In the 1970s many low-caste people adopted a violent Maoist identity. Calling themselves naxalites, these Dalits began to use the theory of counter violence through the Maoist movement. The Maoist movement continues to use violence means such as car bombs and landmines to kill and intimidate..

Rather than diffuse the anger mounting up against them by low caste people, upper caste politicians have continued to oppress the Dalits economically, spiritually, and politically. As Dalits try to convert to other religions such as Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism, the politicians have passed anti-conversion laws that perpetuate Dalit slavery. The democratic experiment in India has thus far failed: it is not a democracy but a caste-ocracy. Only the high caste can learn English, so only they can rule. Even the communists have let the Dalits down. As democracy has failed and the communists have failed, the Dalits and other lower castes have only become more and more angry and been more and more willing to be used.

The United States must address the problem of caste within the context of the US-India relationship. The US should support the effort to abolish caste through the United Nations and other international bodies. Caste is a source of inequality that is listed alongside

race, religion, gender, and language. As the world leader, the US must see the end of untouchability mandated in international forums.

The United States must pressure India to allow freedom of religion for all people in India. Right now no Dalit can become a Hindu priest yet neither can any Dalit change his or her religion. This must end. Dalits and all castes should be able to convert in order to end spiritual slavery.

The United States must support a form of reservation in the private sector. US companies must seek to hire Dalits so Dalits can enter the international economy.

The creation of an intellectual class from the lower castes is of chief importance. We appreciate the efforts of US foundations like the Ford Foundation in giving scholarships for Dalits, Tribals, and other low caste students. I also want to thank the hundreds of Americans who have been financing the education of our children in the villages through Dalit Education Centers started by organizations like the Dalit Freedom Network in Denver, Colorado. Unfortunately, thousands of our engineers and other graduates cannot find jobs in the Indian economy because of caste discrimination. Even firms contracted from America are in the hands of upper caste owners. Employment in these firms is based on caste connections. America can build the confidence of Dalits, Tribals, and Other Backward Castes by giving qualified low caste people a priority in Visa distribution.

The US must conditionally earmark aid to India to provide for English education for low castes. All donations coming from the US to India should only be counted as tax-exempt if the receiving organizations guarantee admission to Dalit, Tribal, and Other Backward Caste children. Even now, the VHP raises funds in the United States that are tax deductible and sends this money to India to enforce caste and keep untouchability. This must stop. No organization should receive US money if it practices caste and untouchability.

The United Nations, World Bank, and IMF should have development guidelines that address the problem of caste in India. Right now this is not the case. For example, the World Bank gives money for education development without putting any condition on the medium of instruction. Thus, the government of India is paid to teach Dalits and Tribals their local languages without teaching them English, which is the language of the parliament. To resolve this and other problems, the IMF and World Bank should invite Dalit, Tribal, and OBC organizations into development dialogues and hire low caste inspectors to ensure the dollars are changing the situation for low caste people.